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JOSEPH AND HIS BRETHREN

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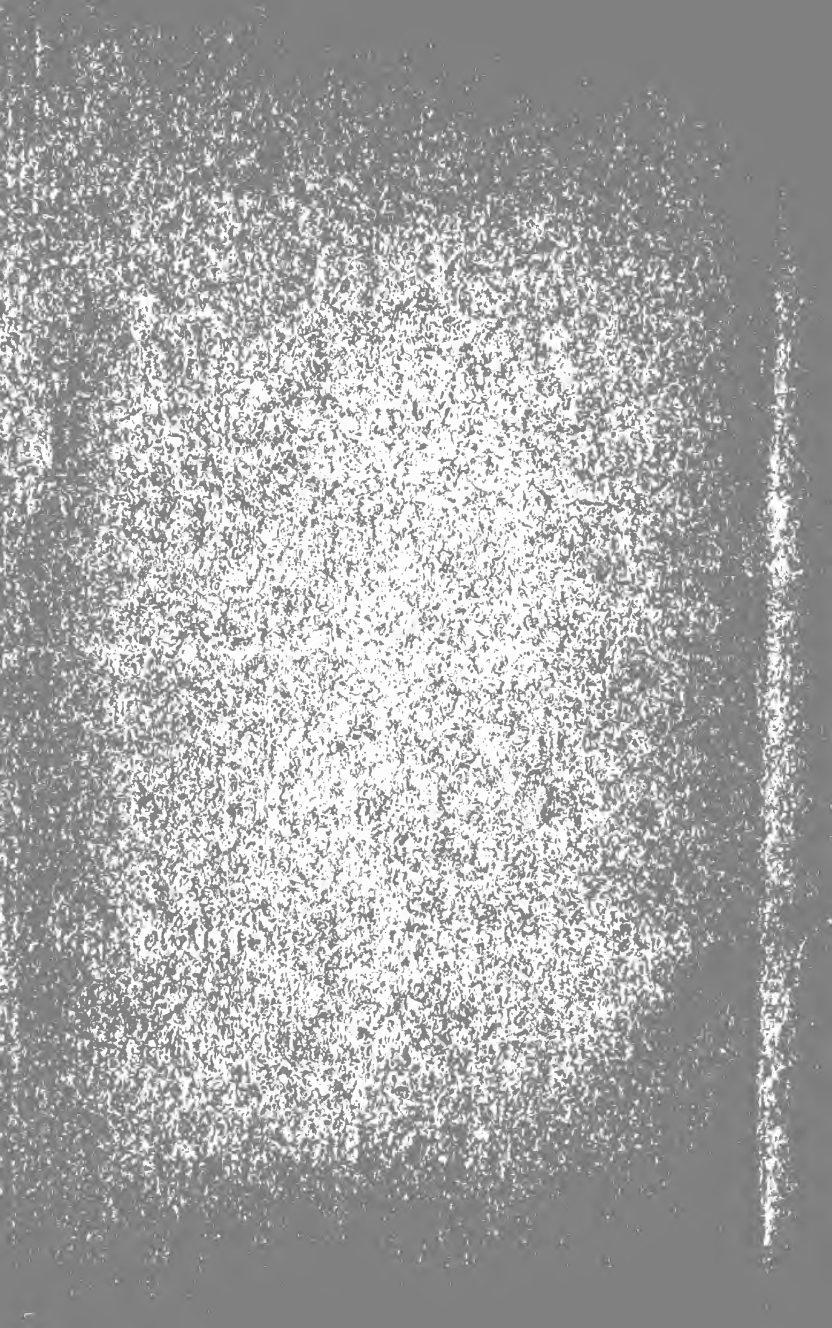
JOSEPH

THREE SCENE PLAY FOR CHILDREN

BY

F. H. SWIFT

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JOSEPH

A DRAMA FOR CHILDREN

IN ONE ACT AND THREE SCENES

BY

FLETCHER HARPER SWIFT

Author of "*The Most Beautiful Thing in the World*"

With an Introduction by

RICHARD MORSE HODGE

Teachers College Columbia University New York

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INTRODUCTION

The plays and games of children testify to the dramatic character of the race. Children are actors by nature. Little children are always playing at parenthood and child-rearing, doctoring the sick, afternoon calls, shopping, tea parties, church services, funerals and weddings. These plays upon the boards of the nursery floor are interpretations of life as they understand it, as truly as the written plays of older dramatists may be said to mirror life for adults. Outdoor games also are essentially dramatic. He who is "it" in tag has a part to perform, and others in the game have their parts according to the rules observed. The pitcher, catcher, baseman and fielder have each a role to act. In every game the players literally act their parts.

In the school-room the study of life is confined commonly to book reading, figuring, maps and pictures. Exceptions are made by some teachers by occasional presentations of simple plays for the study of history and literature. Dramatic songs are part of the formal work of the kindergarten. But, as a rule, when children go to school their dramatic activities are forgotten by most of their teachers. Meanwhile, with an independence as refreshing as it is instructive, children continue to play games when out of school and act charades at home, and youth organize dramatic associations at college.

Once the old miracle plays were relied upon for much of the biblical instruction of children, and grown people as well; and miracle plays persist to the present day in different parts of Europe and Mexico. The dramatization of biblical literature has not been seriously consid-

ered, however, as a means of instructing children at Sunday school. Dramatic work in Sunday school is not without attendant difficulties. The educational purpose must be guarded. Acting must not be allowed to degenerate into a spirit of exhibition or a desire to entertain. We want the acting of a biblical story to send a child to duty and the reading of biblical literature, and not to the theatre. Again the selection of stories for dramatization must be made with discrimination. We may play Joseph, but scarcely Abraham's Offering of Isaac; a parable of Jesus, but not his passion; Balaam and Balak, or a story from the Book of Acts, but not a chapter from the deeds of Jehu, nor the practical jokes of Samson.

On the other hand the difficulties of dramatizing biblical scenes may easily be exaggerated. Children have a more discriminating sense of the fitness of things than they generally are given credit for. Some winters since, a class of children of the first grade of the Model Sunday school at Teachers College were about to recite a lesson upon the parable of the Good Samaritan. They were on the large floor of the kindergarten room. One of them cried: "Let us act the story!" And act it they did, and with no little zest, for children dote on personal violence and rescue. The lesson which followed was on Jesus' crossing the Lake of Galilee in a storm. The children wanted to act this story also. But every child flatly refused to take the part of Jesus. It was finally arranged between the children and teacher that one little girl should stand apart and read the words of Jesus belonging to the narrative, while the others acted the story. So they played the scene in a make-believe boat, in a make-believe storm, on a make-believe lake, without a Jesus in the boat!

Three years ago Professor Fletcher Harper Swift, an alumnus of Union Theological Seminary, and at that time

a graduate student at Teachers College, was encouraged to make an experiment with children of acting the story of Joseph. He dramatized the story and enlisted for its production the boys and girls of the Seventh Grade of Speyer School, the experimental school of Teachers College. He was ably assisted by Mrs. A. F. Carter, teacher of the Seventh Grade of the school. Six weeks of three hours each were spent in studying the biblical narrative. Acting it only deepened the impression already made. The policy of Joseph of taking merciless advantage of the straits of the Egyptian peasantry, monopolizing the farm lands for the crown and reducing the population to slavery, is wisely passed over in the drama prepared by Professor Swift.

The manner of producing the play was very simple. The story was reduced to three scenes. The parts were divided between boys and girls, without regard to sex; and no attempt was made to disguise the sex of the girls in a play of only male characters. Pharaoh was a girl with her hair hanging about her shoulders; but she had a gilt paper crown on her head and sat upon a throne chair and held a scepter. The part of Joseph was given to a different child in each scene, so as to distribute the special benefits of acting the most important character. The play was staged in the gymnasium of the school, and a few pieces of the gymnasium apparatus served for the hanging of simple draperies for the scenes presented. The drama was acted before the parents of the children who played it, and was judged by them as an educational exercise. They agreed that it was a success.

The play of Joseph was called for once more during the same winter at Teachers College as a specimen of dramatic work, in connection with a Sunday school convention and exhibit, arranged by the Department of Biblical Literature. The production was made in the Col-

lege Chapel before an audience of Sunday-school teachers. They preserved the desired educational atmosphere by a respectful attention, without the intrusion of applause or a recall of the actors! The experiment was received very cordially. Many of those present asked for copies of the score of the play with the idea of employing the dramatic method of instruction in the Sunday schools to which they were attached. The play is so well written, it seems to me, that it has only to be read to explain its apparent success in the first instance; and it may safely be ventured, I think, as an example of the possibilities which lie in dramatizing narratives for the religious instruction of children.

Dramatic presentations might be made before Sunday school assemblies. One or more Sunday sessions of the year may be devoted to the purpose, when a biblical story could be presented by a class or by two or three classes in combination.

During the present winter Professor Swift's play has been presented by one of the classes of a New York private school. The study of the piece was confined to a portion of the time regularly allotted to the literature work of the grade. The parents of the children were present when the play was acted. The experiment appears to have been very successful.

New York, March, 1907.

RICHARD MORSE HODGE.

EXPLANATION BY THE AUTHOR.

"Joseph" has been presented twice by the Seventh Grade (12-14 years) of the Speyer School, New York City, to audiences of about three hundred people. Following the two presentations so many requests for copies of the play were made of the author, that he was led to

think of offering it for publication. The question of dramatic entertainments for children offers many difficulties. How to furnish the children something inspiring in its moral thought, classic in style, simple and easy to present, is, we hope, answered by the little play which follows. Owing to the fact that this play has actually been presented, those attempting to produce it will be saved many of the trials commonly encountered in a written but as yet unproduced drama. Special attention is called to the extremely simple scenic requirements described later.

Dr. Hodge, in his introduction, has made clear the fact that the dramatization of the story was the aim presented to the pupils at the first and kept uppermost in their minds to the end; and yet, from the teacher's point of view, this was a secondary aim. The question "What part of to-day's reading would make the best scene in a play?" invariably resulted in excellent artistic and literary criticism on the part of the pupils. Questions concerning scenes and stage-setting furnished live motives for studying the manners and life of a great race. Attempts to imagine the experience and feelings of Joseph on his way to Egypt led to a study of the geographical and historic features of Egypt. Similarly attempting to picture the remorse, which Joseph the dreamer must have suffered before he became Joseph the forgiver, led to a discussion of home ethics: the relations of father to sons and brother to brother. The question, "Would you like to change the last scene and have Joseph take revenge on his brothers instead of forgiving them?" brought forth the beauty of forgiveness and love. It is my hope that these few questions will show how teaching a story as dramatic literature increases its power to arouse in children an appreciation and love for the beautiful and noble in literature and life.

COSTUMES.

The elaborateness of costumes will depend entirely upon the taste and facilities of those managing the play. If the play is to be presented as a part of school work, *e. g.*, at the conclusion of the study of the story of Joseph, the simpler the costumes the better.

JOSEPH—(Scene I.) A flowing robe, ornamented with a border of patchwork, long sleeves; a loose, short, purple jacket; a white under-robe, and a turban.

(Scene II.) Red robe; head bare.

(Scene III.) White robe, bordered with purple; Egyptian head-dress.

THE BROTHERS OF JOSEPH—Flowing robes and turbans of various colors.

PHARAOH—Egyptian costume: purple and white robes and a head-dress.

MAGICIANS—Black robes, trimmed with red.

PAGE—Yellow or olive robe.

SCENERY.

An oblong rectangular frame, supported by four poles. The dimensions of the frame will depend upon the height of the children and the size of the platform. The frame originally used was a pair of parallel bars belonging to a gymnasium. Throughout the play the frame may stand at the rear center of the platform and be used as follows:

In Scene I, for the brothers' tent in the Field of Dothan, drape the top, back and ends of the frame with

black cloth, bearing in mind that the oriental nomadic tents are oblong, with flat roofs. Hang two oriental curtains or rugs from the roof to the floor at either side of the opening in front. Stretch a strip of oriental cloth along the entire length of the roof in front, allowing it to hang down over the front as a border, about a foot and a half deep. Skins and implements suggestive of nomadic life may be hung about the tent entrance, or placed on the floor near the tent.

In Scene II the frame may be transformed into a background for Pharaoh's throne. The only change to be made here will be to cover the front of the frame with as rich draperies and oriental rugs as can be had. Place a chair covered with oriental draperies at the center, on a slight elevation in front of the frame. From the foot of the chair stretch on the floor a long strip of oriental cloth, or a rug.

In Scene III the frame may be made to represent the entrance to Joseph's house. Remove the throne chair. Take away the oriental draperies from the centre of the frame, leaving an opening similar to that of the tent in Scene I, only narrower.

The three scenes are designedly simple, but can be made very effective. In place of oriental draperies and rugs, strips of canton flannel or cheese-cloth may be used. Dull browns, blues, reds and purple are the best colors.

NO CURTAIN.—No curtain is necessary. The shifting of the scenery by the children, and the simplicity and completeness of the transformation will interest the audience.

EXITS.—At the right an exit may be formed by three double screens.

PROGRAMS.—If programs are not used, it will be well for the manager to announce the place of each scene.

CHARACTERS.

JOSEPH :

Taken by a different person in each scene, owing to the lapse of time, and irrespective of sex.

THE BROTHERS :

Reuben, Judah, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Simeon,
Levi, Asher.

PHARAOH.

FIRST MAGICIAN.

THIRD MAGICIAN.

SECOND MAGICIAN.

FOURTH MAGICIAN.

PAGE.

BUTLER.

SCENES.

Scene I.....The Field of Dothan.

Scene II.....Throne-room in the Palace of Pharaoh.

Scene III.....The Palace of Joseph.

SCENE I.

Canaan. The Field of Dothan. Before the tent of Joseph's brothers. DAN, GAD, NAPHTALI, reclining in the tent door; the other brothers outside; JUDAH, standing at the left; SIMEON and LEVI, at the right of tent; REUBEN, sitting on the ground at the right, between Simeon and the tent; and ASHER, sitting at the left, between Judah and the tent. Exit at the right.

Judah. Behold the dreamer!

Dan. What meanest thou by the "dreamer"?

Naphtali. Yes, explain thyself!

Simeon. What! Hast thou not heard of Joseph's dreams? How he strutted about, his head high in air, and expected us to bow down before him as if he were a king!

Dan and Naphtali. Nay, nay, tell us about them.

Judah. Joseph, our father Jacob, and some of us were seated in the tent. Up spake Joseph, saying: "Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed; for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf."

The brothers, excepting Judah, Levi and Rueben. Shall he indeed reign over us, or shall he indeed have dominion over us?

Levi. Yes, and this was not all! Once more did he arise and speak in his pride: "Behold, I have dreamed yet another dream! The sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me." Even our father Jacob was roused to indignation at his words and said: "What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I

and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?"

[*The brothers rise and come out of the tent.*

The brothers, excepting Reuben. Shall we endure such insolence? Shall we let our younger brother thus lord it over us? Nay, let us slay him and cast him into some pit, and we will say, "Some evil beast hath devoured him."

[*Reuben rises.*

Reuben. O brethren, let us not kill our brother, lest we inherit the curse of Cain who slew Abel. Shed no blood. Cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, but lay no hand upon him. [*Aside*] I will go and get helpers and rid him of their hands, to deliver him unto his father again.

[*Exit Reuben.*

Enter JOSEPH.

The Brothers. [*Angrily.*] Lo, he is here. Come now and let us cast him into yonder pit, and we shall see what will become of his dreams!

[*Simeon and Levi seize Joseph.*

Joseph. [*Bewildered.*] What have I done unto my brethren? What do ye seek to do with me?

Simeon and Levi. [*Stripping him of his coat.*] Thou shalt wear this coat no more.

The Brothers. In the pit thou canst tell thy dreams to snakes and jackals. Away to the pit!

[*Exeunt Simeon and Levi dragging Joseph.*

Gad. We are well rid of him. The stars of Dothan will stare upon his starved corpse but will tell no tale. Lo! a cloud of dust in the distance. Who comes hither?

Asher. A band of Ishmaelites. Am I not right? Yes. They are carrying spicery, balm and myrrh!

Judah. Brethren, what profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh.

The Brothers. Yes, let us sell him. We shall thus escape the curse of Cain and fill our empty purses.

[*Exeunt brothers.*]

Enter Reuben, displaying the coat of many colors covered with blood.

Reuben. Alas, I could find no one to help me rescue the child. This I found at the mouth of the pit! The child whom my father loved dearer than life is not! And I, O whither shall I go?

SCENE II.

The Palace of Pharaoh. Throne Room. PHARAOH seated on throne. The First and Second Magicians standing at the right, the Third and Fourth Magicians standing at the left.

Pharaoh. These dreams perplex me sorely. Magicians, have ye no interpretation for me yet?

The Chief Magician. My lord, while we have been withdrawn from our duties the fires upon the altars of the Sun have gone out three times and three times have been rekindled. In all this time we have tasted no morsel of food, closed no eye in sleep, and yet the gods of Egypt withhold from us the interpretation of thy dreams.

The Second Magician. Hear me, my lord, there is in thy household one who hath acquaintance with an interpreter of dreams, even thy majesty's chief butler.

Pharaoh. [To the Second Magician.] Go thou with haste and bring the butler to me.

[Exit the Second Magician.]

Pharaoh. O Isis of Egypt, hear my prayer.

The Third Magician. O Isis and all the gods of Egypt, show us favor.

Enter the SECOND MAGICIAN and the CHIEF BUTLER.

[They prostrate themselves.]

Pharaoh. I am told thou knowest one who interprets dreams. Tell me, is this true?

The Butler. Thou sayest, my lord. There is in the great white prison a young Hebrew who oversees his fellow prisoners. In the day of my distress when I was a prisoner he did interpret truly for me a dream, and a like office did he perform for him who was then thy chief baker.

Pharaoh. What was thy dream and how did he interpret it?

The Butler. In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; and in the vine were three branches; and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes; and Pharaoh's cup was in my hand; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. Likewise the chief of the bakers had a dream. And there was no magician by us to interpret them. The Hebrew youth saw our grief written in our faces. He asked of us the cause. We told him our dreams, and he—

Pharaoh. And he?

The Butler. And he did give to each of us the true interpretation of our dreams; for lo, I, as he promised, was restored to my place and the baker was hanged.

Pharaoh. Truly this is a story that gives hope. Butler, depart and bring this Hebrew to me, but woe to thee if he fail to interpret to me my dreams. [*Exit Butler.*]

The Chief Magician. [*To Pharaoh.*] At last the gods send us a ray of hope.

The Fourth Magician. I have oft heard that these Hebrews are able to interpret dreams.

The Magicians. We pray the gods of the Nile and all Egypt to show favor unto the Shining Star of Egypt, the noble Pharaoh.

Enter The Butler and Joseph.

[*They bow.*]

Pharaoh. Arise, Hebrew. What is thy name?

Joseph. [*Rises.*] Noble King, the name of thy servant is Joseph.

Pharaoh. Joseph, I have heard of thee that thou art able to interpret dreams.

Joseph. Not I, my lord, but Jehovah the God of my fathers shall give unto Pharaoh the interpretation of his dreams.

Pharaoh. Thou namest a god I know not. May he prove more kind to Pharaoh than the gods of Egypt. If thou dost interpret my dreams for me, thou shalt not be unrewarded. Hearest thou this?

Joseph. Let Pharaoh relate unto Joseph his servant his dreams, and by the God of my fathers they shall be interpreted.

Pharaoh. In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river; and behold, there came up out of the river seven cattle, fat fleshed and well favored; and they fed in a meadow; and behold, seven other cattle came up, after them, poor and very ill favored and lean fleshed, such as I never saw in all the land of Egypt for badness; and

the lean and the ill favored cattle did eat up the first seven fat cattle; and when they had eaten them up, it could not be known that they had eaten them but they were still ill favored as at the beginning. So I awoke. And I saw in my dream, and behold, seven ears came upon one stalk, full and good; and behold, seven ears, withered, thin and blasted with the east wind, sprung up after them; and the thin ears devoured the seven good ears; and I told this unto the magicians; but there was none that could declare it to me.

Joseph. The dream of Pharaoh is one; God hath showed Pharaoh what he is about to do. The seven good cattle are seven years; and the seven good ears are seven years; and the dream is one. And the seven thin and ill favored cattle that came up after them are seven years; and the seven empty ears blasted with the east wind shall be seven years of famine. This is the thing which I have spoken unto Pharaoh. Behold there come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt, and there shall arise after them seven years of famine; and all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine shall consume the land; and the plenty shall not be known in the land by reason of that famine following, for it shall be very grievous.

The Chief Magician. Pray tell us why if the dream be one was it doubled unto Pharaoh.

Joseph. The dream was doubled unto Pharaoh because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass.

Pharaoh. Thy interpretation speaks with the voice of truth, but canst thou not do more than this? Tell me, I pray thee, what shall I do to make ready for this evil day.

Joseph. Now, therefore, let Pharaoh look out a man

discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do this, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. And that food shall be for store to the land against seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine.

Pharaoh. [*To the magicians.*] Where can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the wisdom of a god is?

Magicians. Let Joseph be set over the land of Egypt to prepare it for the evil days to come.

Pharaoh. [*Taking off his ring and putting it on Joseph's finger.*] Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art. Thou shalt be over my house; [*Putting a golden chain about Joseph's neck.*] and according unto thy word shall my people be ruled; only in the throne will I be greater than thou. [*Arrays him in a robe of white and gold.*] Thou shalt ride in my second chariot and all men shall bow the knee to thee.

The magicians and the others. [*Bowing the knee and stretching out the hands.*] Hail, hail, bow the knee to Joseph. Joseph, the dreamer, who Pharaoh hath set over all the land of Egypt. Bow the knee to Joseph.

SCENE III.

Before the Palace of Joseph. JOSEPH standing before the entrance. All the brothers present, except Benjamin, prostrating themselves before Joseph with heads bowed to the ground.

Joseph. [*Aside.*] This day are my dreams come true. Here are my brethren at my feet. [*Aloud to brothers, roughly.*] Ye are spies, dogs of Canaan. To see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

Judah. [*Rising.*] Mercy, my lord. Have mercy. We come from the land of Canaan for naught but to buy food.

Joseph. Nay, but to see the nakedness of Egypt are ye come. [*The brothers rise.*]

Asher. Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come. We are all one man's sons. We are true men. Thy servants are no spies.

Levi. Thy servants are twelve brethren, sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

Joseph. Ye are spies; hereby ye shall be proved; by the life of Pharaoh, ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother come hither. Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison until he come.

The Brothers. [*Aside to one another*]. Our guilt has overtaken us. We saw the anguish of Joseph and would not hear.

Reuben. [*Aside to brothers.*] Spake I not unto you, saying, "Do not sin against the child," and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, also his blood is required. [*Aloud to Joseph.*] Have mercy upon thy servants, Ruler of the Nile. Our youngest brother is the comfort of our father's declining years. Joseph, who is no more, he loved the best, and Benjamin, the youngest, he loved next. If thou takest the lad from him it will bring down the gray hairs of our father Jacob to the grave.

Joseph. Ye fashion lies as easily as ye breathe. Know



ye not that to me belongs the power to divine? Ye have no younger brother. Ye are not the sons of one man. Ye are spies come from every corner of Canaan. Unless I see your youngest brother ye shall die the death of spies. *[The brothers prostrate themselves.]*

Joseph. *[Aside.]* My love for them nearly chokes my words. If Benjamin were here I could no longer refrain from making myself known unto them.

Enter page with BENJAMIN.

Joseph. *[Aside.]* God of Jacob, do my eyes indeed behold Benjamin? *[Aloud to page.]* Who is this thou bringest?

The Page. One who says he is the youngest brother of these same Hebrews.

Joseph. *[To brothers.]* Rise, men of Canaan. Did ye not say your youngest brother was in Canaan?

The Brothers. Thou sayest.

Joseph. *[To Benjamin.]* How comest thou here?

Benjamin. So long did my brethren tarry, so long were we kept waiting for food that our father Jacob betook himself with me and the rest of his household to the land of Egypt. Impatient and nearly dying with famine, they wait in the shadow of the pyramids outside the city gates.

Joseph. Men of Canaan, do ye not know your brother?

Reuben. Yea, Ruler of the Nile, we know him. It is our brother Benjamin.

Joseph. Sons of Jacob, know ye not your brother?



Judah. Yea, my lord, we know Benjamin. He is our brother, the youngest son of our father Jacob.

Joseph. Sons of Jacob, when last did ye behold that other brother, the one ye say is not?

The Brothers. [*Aside, greatly troubled.*] What shall we say? [*Aloud.*] He has been dead these many years.

Joseph. Look on me, sons of Jacob. I am Joseph. Doth my father yet live? [*The brothers prostrate themselves.*] Rise, my brethren. Come near to me, I pray you. I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now, therefore, be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither, for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land, and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So it was not you who sent me hither, but God, and he hath made me a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. [*Embracing his brothers.*] Haste ye and go out unto my father, tell him of my glory, and bring him hither.

The Brothers. The dreams of Joseph are to-day come true. He is become our ruler and we are his servants.

Joseph. Fear not, for am I in the place of God? As for you, ye planned evil against me, but God meant it for good. Now, therefore, fear ye not; I will nourish you and your little ones.



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